

School Committee Meeting Minutes
Town Offices
March 15, 2004

Present: Donald Parker, Chairperson
Paul Wilson
Gary Bourassa
Hugh Muffoletto
Bob Prescott

Also Present: Dr. Thomas Scott, Superintendent
Patricia Stern, Business Manager
Tom Walsh, SPED director
Sylvia Jordan, Middle School principal
Suzanne Mahoney, Elementary principal

The meeting was called to order at 6:18 p.m.

The purpose of this special meeting was to discuss the FY05 budget, the only item on the agenda for tonight. Following this meeting the members will meet with the selectmen.

Dr. Scott asked that Patricia Stern begin the meeting by discussing the historical analysis of money charged back to the town as part of the total budget. Mrs. Stern stated that the information provided was broken down into two sections: FY04 estimated and FY03 actual. FY03 actual budget is comprised of many schedules, primarily Schedule 1 and Schedule 19. Schedule 1 reflects the actual expenditures made by the town on behalf of the school. Some of those items include insurance, administrative salaries, supplies and school choice. Schedule 19 takes a look at the previous year's expenditures and projects what expenditures may be needed for the upcoming year.

The historical analysis provided all activity that occurred from FY94 through FY04. After reviewing the data the following information was realized:

- Total money charged back to the school from the town has increased dramatically over the last 10 years. The increase is approximately 289% during this period.
- Local contribution, or what taxpayers have contributed over the same time frame, has not changed significantly. A 26% increase has occurred in this area.
- State funding (Chapter 70) has typically increased over the years. However, FY04 reflected a 10% decrease in funding. Chapter 70 is what has carried the school budget over the years.

- Insurance costs have risen dramatically. Employees currently pay 10% of individual insurance costs and 20% of family costs.
- Unemployment costs have also increased substantially.

Mr. Parker asked how our community compares to others in regard to how much money is charged back to the school. Dr. Scott stated that not all communities charge back everything that Shirley charges; some only charge back insurance costs. Mr. Parker would like the school committee to have ongoing talks with the selectmen regarding charge backs.

At the previous meeting Dr. Scott was asked to present a level funded budget to the committee members for review. Dr. Scott reviewed the changes that level funding would present. Generally, all supplies, postage, workshops, conferences and memberships would be removed from the budget. The only membership that was kept in the budget was to MECA as the benefits of this membership are far greater than our cost to join. Specifically, the changes would be as follows:

- Business/Financial: all administrators would receive a 5% salary increase instead of the previously requested 6-10%. One administrative assistant in the Business Office would have funding and hours cut. It is possible that funding could be provided through the food service department's self funding account.
- Legal Services will be cut in half. New teacher contracts need to be negotiated in FY05; therefore, money needs to be included for these negotiations.
- District-wide Information Management: 2 software contracts will be cut. Hardware, training, repair and license upgrades will be reduced.
- Principals: one secretarial position at SMS will be eliminated. One secretarial position at LAW will be reduced to a school year position.
- Computer tech position was eliminated. Peggy Twiss will be responsible for the computer lab and library at SMS.
- Teacher, Classroom: 1 fourth grade teacher will be cut. 4 teachers will be cut from grades 6 through 8. SMS staffing will go from 16 to 12 teachers, making class size less than 25 per classroom.
- Spanish will be eliminated from SMS. All specialist part-time employees will be reduced. One P.E. teacher will be kept as full-time, teaching both P.E. and health.
- Wilson Reading program will be cut entirely. Reading Recovery will be reduced to 1 ½ teachers due to reduced Title 1 funding.
- Medical/Therapeutic Services: cut back both speech services and home tutoring.
- Substitutes: will be cut significantly. Classes in need of a substitute will be split among the other grade-specific classes.
- Recess aides/ Teacher aides: recess aides will be reduced in both number and in hours. TA's will be reduced to only those children who need one-

on-one assistance. Three will be paid out of the local budget and 2.5 through grants.

- Professional development: all substitutes were cut. All professional development was cut except for what is provided in teachers contract(\$500 reimbursement per teacher).
- Textbooks/Software: grade 8 algebra books cut.
- Other instructional books: cut \$3000 in library books.
- Copy machine: service and supplies reduced.
- General supplies: basically all were cut. Exception was made for kindergarten supplies and science restock kits.
- Classroom instruction: technology & hardware reduced.
- Audio visual: eliminated
- Athletic services: cut entire program with the hope that the Booster club will raise the monies needed.
- Custodial services: eliminated summer hire & part time positions as well as substitutes & overtime; reduced bid order, eliminated uniform stipend.
- Heating & electricity: reduced at SMS & LAW (Devens pays for the Devens School)
- Extraordinary maintenance: all was eliminated.
- Total savings according to level funded budget: \$973, 000.00

Dr. Scott expressed concern that there might not be any carryover money to help support the budget. If this happens then additional money will need to be cut from the budget presented tonight.

It was suggested that the school committee look into the benefits of closing the Devens school. Money can be saved by not leasing the school and by eliminating duplicate jobs (nurse and custodian). The committee members would like to see what it costs to operate Devens and Center School. Mrs. Stern stated that Center School is a self supporting program that uses a revolving account to pay for itself.

If possible, Dr. Scott would like to keep the staff. From what was presented the reductions are broken down as \$456,424.00 in personnel cuts and \$476,369.00 in supplies, etc. Concern was expressed over substitutes not being hired. Children in need of a substitute would be placed in other classrooms, making it very disruptive and not conducive to learning.

Looking back at the historical analysis presented earlier, a question was raised as to how a gradual 3-5% increase in the local contribution over the years might have impacted the current financial situation. An increase in this year alone would only add a small portion to aide the situation.

Another suggestion made was directed toward the teacher salary increases. The teachers are currently contracted to receive a 3% increase. What impact would a 2% raise have on the budget and would the teacher be willing to take lesser raise if it meant saving

positions? Dr. Scott stated that historically the teachers would not be inclined to take the reduction.

It was also suggested that the portion of insurance that employees contribute be increased from 10% individual & 20% family to 25%/75%. A study will be done for a future meeting to discuss the impact of closing Devens, teachers getting a 2% raise, insurance at 25%/75% and a 5% local contribution increase.

Several questions were brought up as to why an override has not been suggested. It is believed that it is a little premature to consider an override as we are not sure what budget numbers we are trying to capture. Another reason would be the reception an override might have on the community given the situation last year. If this is the route to take, we need to get information out to the public letting them know what procedures we are taking to trim the budget. Mrs. Jordan offered to write letters to the local papers stating how the school programs have changed over the past two years and how cutting programs will impact the children. We should also consider wording the override to include a clause that states that if additional funding is provided by the state the school would give that portion of the override back to the community.

Prior to adjourning the meeting the committee agreed to present a level funded budget at the Public Hearing on March 23. All cuts that have been made to reach that budget would also be shown.

A motion was made to adjourn the meeting at 9:45 p.m. Motion was seconded and approved. Meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted by:
Karen Gutheil